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ABSTRACT

Addressing the changing needs of new college student clientele and meeting campus demands of the upcoming decades calls for an interactive teaching approach, one that meshes theory and research with practicality and relevance, and addresses environmental press, the student socialization process, and problem-solving through the diverse techniques of field-based exercises, speaker-practitioners, simulation, role play, case study, computer application, personal reflection, critique, and discussion. Therefore, student affairs professionals need a conceptual framework; a theoretical base; an historical perspective; a knowledge of the jargon; and skill in technology, needs assessment, group dynamics, and program evaluation. Students can interact with proper role models, observe undergraduate behavior in its natural setting, and hone skills needed to fulfill professional roles. This paper chronicles the events and exercises of an interactive masters and doctoral level student personnel administration course that attempts to mesh theory, research, and practicality. Various sections of the paper examine course goals, course objectives, the course content, and observations about the course. (33 references) (Author/NB)

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Preparing the Student Personnel Administrator: Relevance, Research, and Reflection

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Abstract

Addressing the changing needs of new college student clientele and meeting campus demands of the upcoming decades calls for an interactive teaching approach, one that meshes theory and research with practicality and relevance, and addresses environmental press, the student socialization process, and problem-solving through the diverse techniques of field-based exercises, speaker-practitioners, simulation, role play, case study, computer application, personal reflection, critique, and discussion. Therefore, student affairs professionals need a conceptual framework, a theoretical base, an historical perspective, a knowledge of the jargon, and skill in technology, needs assessment, group dynamics, and program evaluation. Students can interact with proper role models, observe undergraduate behavior in its natural setting, and hone skills needed to fulfill professional roles. The dynamics of this type of pre-professional training are chronicled in this graduate course for student personnel administrators.

Preparing the Student Personnel Administrator: Relevance, Research, and Reflection

Introduction

Since Chickering (1969) introduced his definitive work on the developmental processes of the white, traditional aged, male college student, remarkable demographic changes have taken place on the college campus. Campuses now abound with women, non traditional students, displaced workers, minorities, international students, and the physically challenged. Everett (1986) suggests that these challenges have broadened the nature of student personnel work and must therefore, impact the preparation programs for student affairs personnel. The 50th anniversary update of the Student Personnel Point of View (A Perspective.., 1987) is rich with specific responsibilities and expectations for the student personnel worker. Sandeen (1984) recalls that the original student affairs mission was to "bring wholeness to the college experience, to bridge the gap between the curriculum and student life, and to make the institution more humane" (p. 3).

According to Allen, Julian, Stern, and Walborn (1987), Nash, Saurman, and Sousa (1977), and Shaffer (1984), future student affairs practitioners will need a conceptual framework, a theoretical base, and an historical perspective; a knowledge of the jargon; and skills in computer technology, needs assessment, program evaluation, and group dynamics. Allen et al (1987) label

the basic skill clusters as (1) task management---problem-solving, decision-making, and time management; (2) process management---leadership and personnel management; (3) resource management---research and financial management; and (4) risk management or stress management (see also Connors & Pruitt, 1978; Cox & Ivy, 1984; Preston & Schetlen, 1985).

With new clientele come new demands and changing needs that require keen sensitivities to their unique circumstances. Fluid interaction must occur between college students and student personnel administrators (Harper, 1985; Shaffer, 1984). Therefore, faculty who teach graduate courses in student personnel administration should plan curricula around undergraduate students as well as student affairs personnel in order to wed theory and methodology with practical application. The curriculum should incorporate a knowledge base with the specialized tasks that practitioners may encounter. More specifically, realistic, action-centered experiences in multiple campus settings add meaning and dimension to the graduate learning experience (Bloland, 1979; Canon, 1984; Hyman, 1985).

The purpose of this paper is to chronicle the events and exercises of a masters and doctoral level student personnel administration course that attempts to mesh theory, research, and practicality. This interactive graduate course incorporates field-based exercises, speaker-practitioners, simulation, role play, case study, computer application, personal reflection, written critique, class discussion, and short lecture formats.

In addition, this course satisfies the students' cry for relevance and practicality and the academic's emphasis on theory, philosophy, and research (Campbell & Wertz, 1984; Champagne, 1986; Meabon & Owens, 1984; Patterson, 1976).

Course Goals

Students in this graduate personnel course regard course content as timely and relevant to their current and/or future needs in the profession. They learn more effectively through diverse teaching methods, visual stimuli, physical involvement, flexible assignments, meaningful dialog, critical reflection, and problem-solving. While some students study the broader student affairs picture, others explore their own particular interest area within the field. Where possible, graduate students appreciate an opportunity to aid in the course's design so that it reflects their needs and the unique composition of the class (Bevilacqua, 1976; Hintz & Stamatakos, 1978; Nash et al, 1977; Scroggins, 1978).

Graduate students register for this class in student personnel administration expecting to hone their professional skills. Entry level practitioners taking the course learn from the diverse experiences and expertise of their more seasoned classmates. Still others add perspective to the class discussions, especially when the group consists of international students, military, minority students, and non-traditional aged students employed at a variety of colleges and universities (Nash et al, 1976; Scroggins, 1978).

In addition to helping improve oral communication abilities through group dynamics, students also refine their written communication skills. In fact, Everett (1986) recommends the use of short papers, letters, memorandums, and reflective or critical essays to improve interpersonal communication skills.

Course Objectives

Graduate students in this course satisfy behavioral objectives in both the cognitive and affective domains (Bloom, 1956). In addition to studying the organizational structure of the student affairs component, students survey the physical campus and its architectural plan and the impact that it has on student involvement, interpersonal relations, and academics. Students examine the relationship of the undergraduate to the campus environment. Graduate students uncover regularities among the various student clienteles who share the same psycho-social climate. Students also assess the personality and environmental press of a particular campus (Everett, 1986; Smith, 1982; Stonewater, 1983).

Graduate students solve problems and evaluate the relative consequences of the undergraduates' actions through simulation, role play, and case study techniques. Students note the personnel functions and interrelationship of the various student affairs areas. Included in this cursory examination are discussions of the goals, the socialization processes, the environmental contexts, policy-making, discipline, and the impact of each area on the university's academic mission. Finally,

students periodically reflect on their own undergraduate years, the effect of college on their lives, and their personal philosophy of student personnel work (Brown, 1985; Ghee, 1984; Stamatakos, 1978).

Course Content

Breaking the Ice

During the initial class meeting, each student writes down five characteristics of the typical college freshman; then, lists five characteristics of the campus environment that greatly impact, change, or influence students over a two or four year period; and then, recalls five characteristics of the ideal college graduate. Students begin to reflect, reminisce, brain storm, interact, and become sensitized to the world of a college student.

In a follow-through exercise, students recall what it felt like to be a freshman. More specifically, they are asked: What information did they need to know? Where could they locate that information? How helpful was it to them? Who helped them to survive in their new environment? And more importantly, how will they, in their new role as student personnel professional help new students?

Theoretical Base

Most helpful in teaching theoretical content of the college student experience is the use of a conceptual framework (Ennis, 1986) and a cognitive map (Hockbaum, 1968) which combines the undergraduate socialization process with the campus environmental

press. After an explanation of these tools, students draw a cognitive map of their undergraduate years illustrating the social, economic, personal, political, demographic, and academic factors which impacted their decision to apply, matriculate, and remain at their alma mater. This exercise allows the reluctant class participant to discuss their decisions with the help of a personalized, self-generated visual aid.

Research Application

Student affairs professionals need multiple exposure to the research function of their mission. Early in the term, students select a recent research-based article (qualitative or quantative) from a refereed journal supportive of student affairs issues. Then, they critique it using the following set of questions: Was it a 'good' study? Does it have utility and practicality for student affairs professionals, in general; at their institution in particular? If one were to replicate the study, what would be changed? What questions does the article raise in terms of future research in this area of student affairs? This assignment is usually written as well as presented to class for collective comment.

In one qualitative research exercise, each student selects a campus locale frequented by undergraduates and observes their behavior for at least an hour as these undergraduates interact in their natural habitat (union lobby, residence hall lobby, dining area, fraternity house, library). After students report their findings, they draw some generalizations that defend or refute

the theoretical bases and the studies compiled on their extensive reading list. This assignment is presented to class, both in oral and written form.

Another exercise finds students conducting an in-depth interview of a senior-level student affairs administrator on any college campus. To add further depth to the exercise, match each student to a student personnel administrator and have them shadow that person for a day or more. In each case, findings should be recorded and then, supported through the literature and shared with the class.

Environmental Press

At some point during the term, students characterize the campus culture and community of their current institution from the perspective of a visitor to campus. Specifically, they discuss the messages that are intentionally and perhaps, unintentionally transmitted by the physical campus setting. Then, students speculate on how or in what ways the use of physical space, personnel, and facilities are designed to satisfy student needs and affect student involvement, creativity, imagination, congruity, and interpersonal relations. Lastly, students speculate on how effectively student personnel professionals utilize the physical and social environment and how they could modify it in order to send more effective messages to student clientele.

To illustrate the environmental press, employ a simulation exercise called "Design-a-Campus". During class, each of several

small student groups becomes responsible for some aspect of the campus---academic, residential, administrative, social, or recreational. After they read a complete scenario of `Best Co!lege', each design team determines what facilities need to be constructed and where. Following fifteen minutes of intense thought and preparation, one representative from each group heads for the chalkboard to transform its boundaries (via heated negotiation) into Best College. During the debriefing session, graduate students learn that decisions often are made without the knowledge or sanction of everyone involved. Offices of student affairs make decisions for graduate and undergraduate students, therefore, these professionals must take time to understand the wants and needs of a changing student body. They discover that they could have designed a more effective campus if they had known what the academic and administrative groups had planned. The exercise also enhances group dynamics skills.

Published case studies or others from a personal collection spark discussion and refine problem-solving abilities. Students should have time to respond in writing to cases prior to class. With today's technology, student responses to a particular case can be transformed to computer software with branching capabilities for an effective computer simulation. Solutions will come from the students and may be updated as new options become plausible and then feasibility-tested with campus student affairs practitioners.

Ask students to prepare a case study of a real student or

group faced with resolving an actual problem or dealing with a timely issue. Graduate students write, then share the problem during class for collective input. If possible, invite a dean of students to class who will react to some of the situations in terms of how their staff would be utilized to resolve the problem or address the issue. This exercise adds another dimension to environmental inquiry through a qualitative research technique.

For further environmental interaction, give each student a different short problem that needs immediate resolution. Graduate students assume the role of an undergraduate who must call or visit one or more student personnel offices on any campus to solicit help in resolving a personal or academic dilemma. Using class time, students report on whom they contacted and how effective that contact was in solving the problem from a student's perspective. By contrast, they might ponder what they might have done differently had they been serving in the role of the practitioner. Ask students to speculate on the impact that such a situation would have had on an undergraduate facing the real situation.

Using a similar approach, pair students and assign them each a role and a situation for an impromptu role play exercise. The pairs can be counselor-student, two roommates, a dating couple, admissions recruiter-prospective student, faculty-student, head resident-resident assistant, or student government president-dean of students. Professional colleague to colleague situations may be enlightening as well. This exercise increases students' oral

communication and problem-solving abilities.

Practicality

In a course that stresses preparation for practical application, faculty add depth and breadth to the learning experience by inviting campus student affairs professionals to address the class. Practicing professionals welcome the opportunity to discuss their work and their accomplishments. Speaker-practitioners offer a short synopsis of their respective functions and bring a sampling of their public relations materials to class. They often share a crisis situation or issue that their office has encountered recently, ask for class suggestions for resolution, and then, end with a general question and answer session.

For a variation of this approach, assemble the class in the recruiting, admissions, or financial aid office and have the students assume the role of prospective or matriculating freshmen. Experiencing the process may be more beneficial than just hearing or reading about it. If possible, encourage students to attend a college fair or accompany the recruitment team to a local high school guidance office.

Encourage graduate students to keep abreast of current problems and issues that arise on campus. To heighten awareness, students need to choose a problem experienced by a new student group; and then, shadow a member of that group to seek first hand information. Students follow with a detailed report or memorandum to a student affairs professional suggesting changes

or modifications that might be implemented in order to alleviate the problem situation.

Critique and Reflection

Combine practicality with critique by requiring the graduate students to attend several different types of campus activities programming or recreational events such as lectures, recitals, talent performances, or sports events. Their written assignment should include a critique of the activity, its benefit to the campus community, and a brief description of how the event might be improved in terms of location, cost, time, facilities, publicity, and student attendance.

Have students attend a campus workshop for undergraduates that address such areas as study skills, leadership development, the job search, health and wellness, or time and stress management. They should critique the service, its applicability to student needs, and its relevance to student's future pursuits. They should offer suggestions for improvement that help increase campus involvement and awareness, and its impact on the undergraduates served, and send them to the appropriate campus office for comment.

Students should also explore college catalogs from different types of collegiate institutions. They read and critique the format and the stated mission and purpose of student affairs as reflected through campus offerings. In particular, they search for gender, racial, or ethnic biases, voids in needed services, and legally challenging statements. Similarly, students search

for campus policy statements on such topics as hazing, alcohol, drugs, discipline, academic integrity, and harassment; critique them for ambiguous, ethical, or legal implications; rewrite them for class purposes; and submit them to the appropriate student affairs professional for review and comment.

Because of the availability of The Chronicle of Higher Education and Black Issues in Higher Education, students survey these printed resources for reports of unique student programs, campus activities, and relevant course offerings that stress student development principles. Graduate students adapt a similar program to their respective campus and submit a mock prospectus on the project to a student affairs professional for evaluation.

Graduate students should keep a journal of their encounters with undergraduates. They need to chronicle any issues, interactions or problems, how the situation was handled, and upon reflection, what they could have done differently. Periodically, students can share the wisdom of an entry and allow the whole class to reflect upon the outcome (see Murrell & Claxton, 1987). This exercise works especially well with persons employed in or interning in a student personnel service office.

For a final examination, students might answer such appropriate questions as: Based on your observations, why should students join organizations, or attend activities and workshops on this campus? How might you improve a campus service, such as, housing, residence life, financial aid,

registration, parking, safety, health care? How could the student affairs professional more effectively address the needs of such campus groups as the disabled, international, or re-entry student?

Finally, collect resource information in the field that consists of assessment instruments, inventories, or questionnaires on leadership skills, management techniques, and administrative abilities. These insightful tools help students learn about personal qualities and feelings relative to their role as student personnel professional. Require students to determine how they will utilize their positive traits while improving upon their weaknesses and shortcomings. These experiences garner great discussion and also serve as reflective tools.

Observations

The diversity in activities and exercises just discussed may seem overwhelming for a ten to fourteen week course. Therefore, choose what best suits the composition of the class and the esprit of the campus; or let each class member select what interests them and contract for a grade.

Graduate students learn about various areas of professional expertise, interact with proper role models, observe undergraduate behavior in its natural setting, and hone skills needed to fulfill their professional role. More importantly, these students appreciate the opportunity to be active participants and contributors to their own learning. They also

have the occasion to reflect on where they have been, on what they need to know to get where they are going, and on how they can improve those paths for tomorrow's undergraduates (Hyman, 1985; Smith, 1982; Spooner, 1979).

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